

VZCZCXRO8590
OO RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHMR #0355/01 1691728
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 181728Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3063
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3435

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000355

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/S, AF/EX, DS/IP/AF, CA; GABORONE FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/18/2017
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER CLAIMS ATTACKS ARE COUP
ATTEMPT

REF: A) MASERU 351; B) MASERU 340 AND PREVIOUS

MASERU 00000355 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Charge d'Affaires a.i. W. Patrick Murphy, CDA
a.i., EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Lesotho's Deputy Prime Minister, in a June 18 briefing for chiefs of diplomatic missions, said that the violent security environment in the capital city of Maseru, which deteriorated further following implementation of a daily curfew on June 15, had taken on "political undertones, involving individuals who have infiltrated our establishment and who want to overthrow the government." He said the GOL had made several arrests of military and police personnel, stating that members of the Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) are behind the string of attacks and are attempting to "raise their own army" to do more harm. End Summary.

¶2. (U) At the request of chiefs of diplomatic missions in Lesotho, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Archibald Lesao Lehohla met on June 18 with the diplomatic corps to discuss the GOL's ongoing curfew and deteriorating security climate. Foreign Minister Tsekoa and Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Phooko joined the DPM. The Ambassadors of Ireland (acting Dean) and the European Commission, the UN Resident Coordinator (UNRC), and Charges from the U.S., Chinese, South African, and Libyan embassies participated in the session, which lasted an hour and a half.

¶3. (SBU) DPM Lesao, who also serves as Minister of Home Affairs, said that the original rationale for the daily 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. curfew, which security officials imposed on the evening of Friday June 15, was to apprehend the "faceless criminals" who had attacked the residences and vehicles of GOL ministers June 10 and 14 and to seize automatic rifles stolen from Lesotho Defense Forces (LDF) guards by the armed assailants (refs A and B). The DPM, who said the assailants has warned the LDF guards that they intended to "murder the ministers," said the GOL had initially expected to recover the weapons and lift the curfew within "two or three days."

¶4. (SBU) The DPM said that the security situation deteriorated significantly over the weekend of June 16-17. During the middle of the night on June 17, a senior police inspector responded to a report of LDF and Lesotho Mounted Police (LMP) personnel "misbehaving at an unapproved security checkpoint" in southern Maseru. An LDF soldier, realizing that the police inspector recognized the soldiers, shot and seriously wounded the police official and seized his vehicle. Also on June 17, GOL security units in northern Maseru engaged in "heavy gunfire with armed

bandits," resulting in the seizure of seven LDF automatic rifles and numerous official security vehicles (Note: Armed and uniformed assailants carjacked a U.S. Mission vehicle in this neighborhood the same evening; see septel. End Note).

15. (C) The DPM said that as a result of the latest attacks, and a "new dimension" of unauthorized checkpoints manned by renegade security units, the situation had taken on "political undertones, involving individuals who have infiltrated our establishment and who want to overthrow the government." He said the GOL had made several arrests of military personnel, stating that members of the LDF are behind the string of attacks and are attempting to "raise their own army" to do more harm. "We don't know if we are mopping up a mess," he added, "or preparing for a big war yet to come."

16. (U) In addition to the carjacking of a U.S. mission vehicle raised by Charge, other diplomats reported the assault of local employees and drivers at checkpoints, harassment of diplomats on the first night of the curfew, and reports of nighttime gunfire throughout the weekend of June 16-17.

17. (C) Minister Phooko, responding to inquiries from the diplomats about permits for circulating during curfew hours, said that the GOL did not want to expose any residents, including diplomats, to the security threats. "We appeal for your restraint," he said. Charge pressed for GOL accommodation and/or assistance in the event of medical or security emergencies, and the UNRC reminded the ministers of the GOL's responsibility for the security of diplomatic personnel and property. The DPM gave assurances of GOL protection, and FM Tsekoa said he would endeavor to establish a call center for

SIPDIS

diplomatic missions requiring assistance during curfew hours. (Note: The FM committed to providing information on the call center and written notification of the curfew to missions on June 18; post had received nothing by COB. End Note).

18. (C) The EC Ambassador criticized the DPM for not mentioning

MASERU 00000355 002.2 OF 002

the June 14 violent attack on the residence of leading opposition figure Tom Thabane, and offered that if GOL forces "overreach" in imposing the curfew, it will lead to a negative reaction among the general public. The UNRC added that Thabane had approached her about the attack on his residence, and she requested that the GOL be responsive to him. The DPM, who initially said he hadn't heard about the attack on Thabane but subsequently acknowledged an ongoing police investigation, replied that the attack "doesn't make any sense. We (GOL) are a target for weapons; does this mean Thabane also has weapons?"

19. (C) The EC Ambassador also pressed for a legal basis for the curfew, to which the DPM replied that Lesotho's "Internal Security Act" defined the ability of the Police Commissioner to declare and enforce a curfew. Charge raised rumors that the GOL had declared a "State of Emergency." (Note: According to Embassy sources, the curfew was an outcome of an emergency GOL cabinet meeting on June 15. End Note.) The DPM, who said he planned to make a public announcement later in the day on the security deterioration and the involvement of renegade military and security personnel, denied the rumors, pointing out that such a declaration would require the action of the Government Council and the approval of the King. He added, however, that the situation in Lesotho is "very abnormal" as the GOL is facing a serious threat from a "well orchestrated effort" to disarm the LDF. "Our temptation is to shoot," he concluded, "but curiously, it is the other side that is shooting at us."

Comment: A New Challenge

¶10. (C) Although the GOL has faced high profile armed attacks and assassination attempts (several successful) against senior officials and political figures over the past two years, the recent spate of brazen assaults and disarming of police and military personnel has clearly flummoxed authorities. The Deputy Prime Minister offered no identity or political motives of the alleged coup plotters, and it is noteworthy that the DPM has had difficult relations in the past with senior military and police officials. His curious comments on ABC leader Thabane give some credence to local speculation that the GOL also believes the political opposition is involved with the attacks on GOL personnel. At the same briefing offered by the DPM on security, the FM gave the diplomats a readout on the recent visit of SADC envoy former Botswana President Masire and his efforts to mediate between the GOL and the opposition (septel). That the ministers would brief on both the alleged coup plotting and the mediation efforts further suggests that the GOL sees a connection between the country's post-election political impasse and recent violence. End Comment.

MURPHY